



# Commute even longer? Blame Maricopa

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Cars start their northward trek before the sun rises every weekday. By morning rush hour, a steady line of vehicles stream along Maricopa Road toward Ahwatukee, Chandler and other Valley cities with scant braking room between them.

The flood of traffic from Maricopa is surprising considering it comes from a relatively new city that for decades was a rural farming community. And it's taking its toll on roads leading to and from employment hubs in Chandler, Tempe, Mesa and even Gilbert and Ahwatukee.

"What we see is most of them (residents) going into the greater Phoenix metro area," said Danielle Casey, a management assistant for the city who has lived in Maricopa since July 2004. "But for people who are going to Ahwatukee or Chandler or anything south of U.S. 60, it only takes 20 to 30 minutes."

It takes Casey's husband 40 minutes to drive to his job in south Phoenix, a commute comparable to those from closer-in east Valley cities.

"There's just not as much local traffic you're battling when you're getting on the road," she said.

The city surveyed its residents and found many work for Intel Corp., which operates two computer chip factories in Chandler.

"While transportation is a challenge for everyone in Arizona, it's No. 3 on the City Council (priority) list behind public safety and economic development," Casey said.

And boosting its employer base could ease the city's transportation troubles, Maricopa Mayor Kelly Anderson said.

"There's a lot of commuter drivers. But we're trying to compress our economic development plan from 15 years to five years," Anderson said.

Maricopa recently was admitted to the Greater Phoenix Economic Council, a regional business recruitment and retention group. Its inclusion marks the first non-Maricopa County city to be included in the group; Maricopa is within Pinal County.

Anderson said the city's membership in GPEC will help Maricopa develop its industrial sector and not become a bedroom community.

"The (city) council concerns is that we're a self-sustaining community," he said.

"We're being very very strong on our employment-to-residential ratio."

Maricopa, incorporated in October 2003, estimates its population at 32,000 residents based on water hookups and new residential home building permits. That's double from the 16,934 residents the U.S. Census counted just two years ago in 2005.

By late 2010, the city estimates it will have 78,934 residents - almost as many as Ahwatukee Foothills.

Anderson said the Maricopa City Council hasn't adopted a resolution about the proposed South Mountain Loop 202 being studied for Pecos Road in Ahwatukee.

"I think it's going to be a route of importance, where it lands is out of our hands, whether it's on the Ahwatukee side or the Gila River (Indian Community) side. It bodes well for people of the Gila to think of transportation in an economic development sense."

In November, the tribal council agreed to establish a transportation team to begin "exploratory negotiations" with the Arizona Department of Transportation and federal officials over various roadways, including the South Mountain Freeway and widening Interstate 10.

The tribe meets on a regular basis with Gov. Janet Napolitano, who hasn't said publicly whether she supports or opposes the proposed 10-lane South Mountain Freeway being built along Pecos Road.

Some residents see the freeway as a solution for commuters who want to avoid the Broadway Curve bottleneck on Interstate 10 by going west to 55th Avenue. That route would cut into the western edge of South Mountain, which the tribe considers sacred and others say should be preserved.

Maricopa residents say they just want another way to get to and from work. Many currently use Beltline Road, a 12-mile asphalt road that swings south around South Mountain, cutting through the Gila River Indian Reservation and providing a bypass for commercial trucks and cars heading northwest from the Southeast Valley and Tucson, and vice versa.

Beltline Road is maintained by the Maricopa County Department of Transportation. Nearly 9,000 vehicles on average each day rumble over the road as of October, spokesman Roger Ball said. That's up from 7,800 vehicles on average a year earlier.

Anderson said Maricopa city officials hope the city's proximity, about 20 minutes away from Pecos Road, will turn out to be a draw for residents of Ahwatukee and other east Valley cities once Maricopa's business base is built.

"We could be a reverse commute for Ahwatukee," he said.

### What do you think?

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At least Maricopa County is looking to fix the issue. On the other hand we need to FIRE all of Pinal Officials for there head in the sand approach!!! Go look @ Hunt highway and all the people getting hurt or killed!! Sandy Smith Where is the Tax money from this area going??? You need to be the first to go!! (**gregg4143**, May 10, 2007 07:58AM)

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I love urban sprawl! It's great! (**russell923**, May 9, 2007 08:09PM)

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I have lived in Maricopa for almost a year and prefer this city to other newer developed cities like Surprise or Queen Creek because of it's location. I enjoy the fact that I leave the city when I drive home and I don't feel like Maricopa is just another suburb of Phoenix. It has the potential to maintain that "small-town" atmosphere even in the population grows as quickly as predicted. The commute could be better but I think that could be said of most commutes regardless of where you live. But the reality is that the majority of jobs are in Phoenix and until more jobs spread out into the newer developed areas, the commutes around the entire city are going to be long. This is not just a Maricopa problem, it is a Maricopa COUNTY problem (and now we need to include Pinal County into that as well). (**Jen7388**, May 9, 2007 05:07PM)

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